

V. THE EVENTS OF ONE DAY

1. AUGUST THE EIGHTH. MORNING AND AFTERNOON

At post-time on that following Monday morning, Cytherea watched so anxiously for the postman, that as the time which must bring him narrowed less and less her vivid expectation had only a degree less tangibility than his presence itself. In another second his form came into view. He brought two letters for Cytherea.

One from Miss Aldclyffe, simply stating that she wished Cytherea to come on trial: that she would require her to be at Knapwater House by Monday evening.

The other was from Edward Springrove. He told her that she was the bright spot of his life: that her existence was far dearer to him than his own: that he had never known what it was to love till he had met her. True, he had felt passing attachments to other faces from time to time; but they all had been weak inclinations towards those faces as they then appeared. He loved her past and future, as well as her present. He pictured her as a child: he loved her. He pictured her of sage years: he loved her. He pictured her in trouble; he loved her. Homely friendship entered into his love for her, without which all love

was evanescent.

He would make one depressing statement. Uncontrollable circumstances (a long history, with which it was impossible to acquaint her at present) operated to a certain extent as a drag upon his wishes. He had felt this more strongly at the time of their parting than he did now--and it was the cause of his abrupt behaviour, for which he begged her to forgive him. He saw now an honourable way of freeing himself, and the perception had prompted him to write. In the meantime might he indulge in the hope of possessing her on some bright future day, when by hard labour generated from her own encouraging words, he had placed himself in a position she would think worthy to be shared with him?

Dear little letter; she huddled it up. So much more important a love-letter seems to a girl than to a man. Springrove was unconsciously clever in his letters, and a man with a talent of that kind may write himself up to a hero in the mind of a young woman who loves him without knowing much about him. Springrove already stood a cubit higher in her imagination than he did in his shoes.

During the day she flitted about the room in an ecstasy of pleasure, packing the things and thinking of an answer which should be worthy of the tender tone of the question, her love bubbling from her involuntarily, like prophesyings from a prophet.

In the afternoon Owen went with her to the railway-station, and put her

in the train for Carriford Road, the station nearest to Knapwater House.

Half-an-hour later she stepped out upon the platform, and found nobody there to receive her--though a pony-carriage was waiting outside. In two minutes she saw a melancholy man in cheerful livery running towards her from a public-house close adjoining, who proved to be the servant sent to fetch her. There are two ways of getting rid of sorrows: one by living them down, the other by drowning them. The coachman drowned his.

He informed her that her luggage would be fetched by a spring-waggon in about half-an-hour; then helped her into the chaise and drove off.

Her lover's letter, lying close against her neck, fortified her against the restless timidity she had previously felt concerning this new undertaking, and completely furnished her with the confident ease of mind which is required for the critical observation of surrounding objects. It was just that stage in the slow decline of the summer days, when the deep, dark, and vacuous hot-weather shadows are beginning to be replaced by blue ones that have a surface and substance to the eye. They trotted along the turnpike road for a distance of about a mile, which brought them just outside the village of Carriford, and then turned through large lodge-gates, on the heavy stone piers of which stood a pair of bitterns cast in bronze. They then entered the park and wound along a drive shaded by old and drooping lime-trees, not arranged in the form of an avenue, but standing irregularly, sometimes leaving the track completely exposed to the sky, at other times casting a shade over it,

which almost approached gloom--the under surface of the lowest boughs hanging at a uniform level of six feet above the grass--the extreme height to which the nibbling mouths of the cattle could reach.

'Is that the house?' said Cytherea expectantly, catching sight of a grey gable between the trees, and losing it again.

'No; that's the old manor-house--or rather all that's left of it. The Aldycliffes used to let it sometimes, but it was oftener empty. 'Tis now divided into three cottages. Respectable people didn't care to live there.'

'Why didn't they?'

'Well, 'tis so awkward and unhandy. You see so much of it has been pulled down, and the rooms that are left won't do very well for a small residence. 'Tis so dismal, too, and like most old houses stands too low down in the hollow to be healthy.'

'Do they tell any horrid stories about it?'

'No, not a single one.'

'Ah, that's a pity.'

'Yes, that's what I say. 'Tis jest the house for a nice ghastly

hair-on-end story, that would make the parish religious. Perhaps it will have one some day to make it complete; but there's not a word of the kind now. There, I wouldn't live there for all that. In fact, I couldn't. O no, I couldn't.'

'Why couldn't you?'

'The sounds.'

'What are they?'

'One is the waterfall, which stands so close by that you can hear that there waterfall in every room of the house, night or day, ill or well.

'Tis enough to drive anybody mad: now hark.'

He stopped the horse. Above the slight common sounds in the air came the unvarying steady rush of falling water from some spot unseen on account of the thick foliage of the grove.

'There's something awful in the timing o' that sound, ain't there, miss?'

'When you say there is, there really seems to be. You said there were two--what is the other horrid sound?'

'The pumping-engine. That's close by the Old House, and sends water up

the hill and all over the Great House. We shall hear that directly....

There, now hark again.'

From the same direction down the dell they could now hear the whistling creak of cranks, repeated at intervals of half-a-minute, with a sousing noise between each: a creak, a souse, then another creak, and so on continually.

'Now if anybody could make shift to live through the other sounds, these would finish him off, don't you think so, miss? That machine goes on night and day, summer and winter, and is hardly ever greased or visited. Ah, it tries the nerves at night, especially if you are not very well; though we don't often hear it at the Great House.'

'That sound is certainly very dismal. They might have the wheel greased. Does Miss Aldclyffe take any interest in these things?'

'Well, scarcely; you see her father doesn't attend to that sort of thing as he used to. The engine was once quite his hobby. But now he's gotten old and very seldom goes there.'

'How many are there in family?'

'Only her father and herself. He's a' old man of seventy.'

'I had thought that Miss Aldclyffe was sole mistress of the property,

and lived here alone.'

'No, m--' The coachman was continually checking himself thus, being about to style her miss involuntarily, and then recollecting that he was only speaking to the new lady's-maid.

'She will soon be mistress, however, I am afraid,' he continued, as if speaking by a spirit of prophecy denied to ordinary humanity. 'The poor old gentleman has decayed very fast lately.' The man then drew a long breath.

'Why did you breathe sadly like that?' said Cytherea.

'Ah!... When he's dead peace will be all over with us old servants. I expect to see the old house turned inside out.'

'She will marry, do you mean?'

'Marry--not she! I wish she would. No, in her soul she's as solitary as Robinson Crusoe, though she has acquaintances in plenty, if not relations. There's the rector, Mr. Raunham--he's a relation by marriage--yet she's quite distant towards him. And people say that if she keeps single there will be hardly a life between Mr. Raunham and the heirship of the estate. Dang it, she don't care. She's an extraordinary picture of womankind--very extraordinary.'

'In what way besides?'

'You'll know soon enough, miss. She has had seven lady's-maids this last twelvemonth. I assure you 'tis one body's work to fetch 'em from the station and take 'em back again. The Lord must be a neglectful party at heart, or he'd never permit such overbearen goings on!'

'Does she dismiss them directly they come!'

'Not at all--she never dismisses them--they go themselves. Ye see 'tis like this. She's got a very quick temper; she flees in a passion with them for nothing at all; next mornen they come up and say they are going; she's sorry for it and wishes they'd stay, but she's as proud as a lucifer, and her pride won't let her say, "Stay," and away they go.

'Tis like this in fact. If you say to her about anybody, "Ah, poor thing!" she says, "Pooh! indeed!" If you say, "Pooh, indeed!" "Ah, poor thing!" she says directly. She hangs the chief baker, as mid be, and restores the chief butler, as mid be, though the devil but Pharaoh herself can see the difference between 'em.'

Cytherea was silent. She feared she might be again a burden to her brother.

'However, you stand a very good chance,' the man went on, 'for I think she likes you more than common. I have never known her send the pony-carriage to meet one before; 'tis always the trap, but this time

she said, in a very particular ladylike tone, "Roobert, gaow with the pony-kerriage."... There, 'tis true, pony and carriage too are gotten rather shabby now,' he added, looking round upon the vehicle as if to keep Cytherea's pride within reasonable limits.

"Tis to be hoped you'll please in dressen her to-night.'

'Why to-night?'

'There's a dinner-party of seventeen; 'tis her father's birthday, and she's very particular about her looks at such times. Now see; this is the house. Livelier up here, isn't it, miss?'

They were now on rising ground, and had just emerged from a clump of trees. Still a little higher than where they stood was situated the mansion, called Knapwater House, the offices gradually losing themselves among the trees behind.

2. EVENING

The house was regularly and substantially built of clean grey freestone throughout, in that plainer fashion of Greek classicism which prevailed at the latter end of the last century, when the copyists called designers had grown weary of fantastic variations in the Roman orders. The main block approximated to a square on the ground plan, having a projection in the centre of each side, surmounted by a pediment. From

each angle of the inferior side ran a line of buildings lower than the rest, turning inwards again at their further end, and forming within them a spacious open court, within which resounded an echo of astonishing clearness. These erections were in their turn backed by ivy-covered ice-houses, laundries, and stables, the whole mass of subsidiary buildings being half buried beneath close-set shrubs and trees.

There was opening sufficient through the foliage on the right hand to enable her on nearer approach to form an idea of the arrangement of the remoter or lawn front also. The natural features and contour of this quarter of the site had evidently dictated the position of the house primarily, and were of the ordinary, and upon the whole, most satisfactory kind, namely, a broad, graceful slope running from the terrace beneath the walls to the margin of a placid lake lying below, upon the surface of which a dozen swans and a green punt floated at leisure. An irregular wooded island stood in the midst of the lake; beyond this and the further margin of the water were plantations and greensward of varied outlines, the trees heightening, by half veiling, the softness of the exquisite landscape stretching behind.

The glimpses she had obtained of this portion were now checked by the angle of the building. In a minute or two they reached the side door, at which Cytherea alighted. She was welcomed by an elderly woman of lengthy smiles and general pleasantness, who announced herself to be Mrs. Morris, the housekeeper.

'Mrs. Graye, I believe?' she said.

'I am not--O yes, yes, we are all mistresses,' said Cytherea, smiling, but forcedly. The title accorded her seemed disagreeably like the first slight scar of a brand, and she thought of Owen's prophecy.

Mrs. Morris led her into a comfortable parlour called The Room. Here tea was made ready, and Cytherea sat down, looking, whenever occasion allowed, at Mrs. Morris with great interest and curiosity, to discover, if possible, something in her which should give a clue to the secret of her knowledge of herself, and the recommendation based upon it. But nothing was to be learnt, at any rate just then. Mrs. Morris was perpetually getting up, feeling in her pockets, going to cupboards, leaving the room two or three minutes, and trotting back again.

'You'll excuse me, Mrs. Graye,' she said, 'but 'tis the old gentleman's birthday, and they always have a lot of people to dinner on that day, though he's getting up in years now. However, none of them are sleepers--she generally keeps the house pretty clear of lodgers (being a lady with no intimate friends, though many acquaintances), which, though it gives us less to do, makes it all the duller for the younger maids in the house.' Mrs. Morris then proceeded to give in fragmentary speeches an outline of the constitution and government of the estate.

'Now, are you sure you have quite done tea? Not a bit or drop more? Why,

you've eaten nothing, I'm sure.... Well, now, it is rather inconvenient that the other maid is not here to show you the ways of the house a little, but she left last Saturday, and Miss Aldclyffe has been making shift with poor old clumsy me for a maid all yesterday and this morning. She is not come in yet. I expect she will ask for you, Mrs. Graye, the first thing.... I was going to say that if you have really done tea, I will take you upstairs, and show you through the wardrobes--Miss Aldclyffe's things are not laid out for to-night yet.'

She preceded Cytherea upstairs, pointed out her own room, and then took her into Miss Aldclyffe's dressing-room, on the first-floor; where, after explaining the whereabouts of various articles of apparel, the housekeeper left her, telling her that she had an hour yet upon her hands before dressing-time. Cytherea laid out upon the bed in the next room all that she had been told would be required that evening, and then went again to the little room which had been appropriated to herself.

Here she sat down by the open window, leant out upon the sill like another Blessed Damozel, and listlessly looked down upon the brilliant pattern of colours formed by the flower-beds on the lawn--now richly crowded with late summer blossom. But the vivacity of spirit which had hitherto enlivened her, was fast ebbing under the pressure of prosaic realities, and the warm scarlet of the geraniums, glowing most conspicuously, and mingling with the vivid cold red and green of the verbenas, the rich depth of the dahlia, and the ripe mellowness of the calceolaria, backed by the pale hue of a flock of meek sheep feeding in

the open park, close to the other side of the fence, were, to a great extent, lost upon her eyes. She was thinking that nothing seemed worth while; that it was possible she might die in a workhouse; and what did it matter? The petty, vulgar details of servitude that she had just passed through, her dependence upon the whims of a strange woman, the necessity of quenching all individuality of character in herself, and relinquishing her own peculiar tastes to help on the wheel of this alien establishment, made her sick and sad, and she almost longed to pursue some free, out-of-doors employment, sleep under trees or a hut, and know no enemy but winter and cold weather, like shepherds and cowkeepers, and birds and animals--ay, like the sheep she saw there under her window. She looked sympathizingly at them for several minutes, imagining their enjoyment of the rich grass.

'Yes--like those sheep,' she said aloud; and her face reddened with surprise at a discovery she made that very instant.

The flock consisted of some ninety or a hundred young stock ewes: the surface of their fleece was as rounded and even as a cushion, and white as milk. Now she had just observed that on the left buttock of every one of them were marked in distinct red letters the initials 'E. S.'

'E. S.' could bring to Cytherea's mind only one thought; but that immediately and for ever--the name of her lover, Edward Springrove.

'O, if it should be--!' She interrupted her words by a resolve. Miss

Aldclyffe's carriage at the same moment made its appearance in the drive; but Miss Aldclyffe was not her object now. It was to ascertain to whom the sheep belonged, and to set her surmise at rest one way or the other. She flew downstairs to Mrs. Morris.

'Whose sheep are those in the park, Mrs. Morris?'

'Farmer Springrove's.'

'What Farmer Springrove is that?' she said quickly.

'Why, surely you know? Your friend, Farmer Springrove, the cider-maker, and who keeps the Three Tranters Inn; who recommended you to me when he came in to see me the other day?'

Cytherea's mother-wit suddenly warned her in the midst of her excitement that it was necessary not to betray the secret of her love. 'O yes,' she said, 'of course.' Her thoughts had run as follows in that short interval:--

'Farmer Springrove is Edward's father, and his name is Edward too.

'Edward knew I was going to advertise for a situation of some kind.

'He watched the Times, and saw it, my address being attached.

'He thought it would be excellent for me to be here that we might meet whenever he came home.

'He told his father that I might be recommended as a lady's-maid; and he knew my brother and myself.

'His father told Mrs. Morris; Mrs. Morris told Miss Aldclyffe.'

The whole chain of incidents that drew her there was plain, and there was no such thing as chance in the matter. It was all Edward's doing.

The sound of a bell was heard. Cytherea did not heed it, and still continued in her reverie.

'That's Miss Aldclyffe's bell,' said Mrs. Morris.

'I suppose it is,' said the young woman placidly.

'Well, it means that you must go up to her,' the matron continued, in a tone of surprise.

Cytherea felt a burning heat come over her, mingled with a sudden irritation at Mrs. Morris's hint. But the good sense which had recognized stern necessity prevailed over rebellious independence; the flush passed, and she said hastily--

'Yes, yes; of course, I must go to her when she pulls the bell--whether I want to or no.'

However, in spite of this painful reminder of her new position in life, Cytherea left the apartment in a mood far different from the gloomy sadness of ten minutes previous. The place felt like home to her now; she did not mind the pettiness of her occupation, because Edward evidently did not mind it; and this was Edward's own spot. She found time on her way to Miss Aldclyffe's dressing-room to hurriedly glide out by a side door, and look for a moment at the unconscious sheep bearing the friendly initials. She went up to them to try to touch one of the flock, and felt vexed that they all stared sceptically at her kind advances, and then ran pell-mell down the hill. Then, fearing any one should discover her childish movements, she slipped indoors again, and ascended the staircase, catching glimpses, as she passed, of silver-buttoned footmen, who flashed about the passages like lightning.

Miss Aldclyffe's dressing-room was an apartment which, on a casual survey, conveyed an impression that it was available for almost any purpose save the adornment of the feminine person. In its hours of perfect order nothing pertaining to the toilet was visible; even the inevitable mirrors with their accessories were arranged in a roomy recess not noticeable from the door, lighted by a window of its own, called the dressing-window.

The washing-stand figured as a vast oak chest, carved with grotesque Renaissance ornament. The dressing table was in appearance something between a high altar and a cabinet piano, the surface being richly worked in the same style of semi-classic decoration, but the extraordinary outline having been arrived at by an ingenious joiner and decorator from the neighbouring town, after months of painful toil in cutting and fitting, under Miss Aldclyffe's immediate eye; the materials being the remains of two or three old cabinets the lady had found in the lumber-room. About two-thirds of the floor was carpeted, the remaining portion being laid with parquetry of light and dark woods.

Miss Aldclyffe was standing at the larger window, away from the dressing-niche. She bowed, and said pleasantly, 'I am glad you have come. We shall get on capitally, I dare say.'

Her bonnet was off. Cytherea did not think her so handsome as on the earlier day; the queenliness of her beauty was harder and less warm. But a worse discovery than this was that Miss Aldclyffe, with the usual obliviousness of rich people to their dependents' specialities, seemed to have quite forgotten Cytherea's inexperience, and mechanically delivered up her body to her handmaid without a thought of details, and with a mild yawn.

Everything went well at first. The dress was removed, stockings and black boots were taken off, and silk stockings and white shoes were put on. Miss Aldclyffe then retired to bathe her hands and face, and

Cytherea drew breath. If she could get through this first evening, all would be right. She felt that it was unfortunate that such a crucial test for her powers as a birthday dinner should have been applied on the threshold of her arrival; but set to again.

Miss Aldclyffe was now arrayed in a white dressing-gown, and dropped languidly into an easy-chair, pushed up before the glass. The instincts of her sex and her own practice told Cytherea the next movement. She let Miss Aldclyffe's hair fall about her shoulders, and began to arrange it. It proved to be all real; a satisfaction.

Miss Aldclyffe was musingly looking on the floor, and the operation went on for some minutes in silence. At length her thoughts seemed to turn to the present, and she lifted her eyes to the glass.

'Why, what on earth are you doing with my head?' she exclaimed, with widely opened eyes. At the words she felt the back of Cytherea's little hand tremble against her neck.

'Perhaps you prefer it done the other fashion, madam?' said the maiden.

'No, no; that's the fashion right enough, but you must make more show of my hair than that, or I shall have to buy some, which God forbid!'

'It is how I do my own,' said Cytherea naively, and with a sweetness of tone that would have pleased the most acrimonious under favourable

circumstances; but tyranny was in the ascendant with Miss Aldclyffe at this moment, and she was assured of palatable food for her vice by having felt the trembling of Cytherea's hand.

'Yours, indeed! Your hair! Come, go on.' Considering that Cytherea possessed at least five times as much of that valuable auxiliary to woman's beauty as the lady before her, there was at the same time some excuse for Miss Aldclyffe's outburst. She remembered herself, however, and said more quietly, 'Now then, Graye--By-the-bye, what do they call you downstairs?'

'Mrs. Graye,' said the handmaid.

'Then tell them not to do any such absurd thing--not but that it is quite according to usage; but you are too young yet.'

This dialogue tided Cytherea safely onward through the hairdressing till the flowers and diamonds were to be placed upon the lady's brow. Cytherea began arranging them tastefully, and to the very best of her judgment.

'That won't do,' said Miss Aldclyffe harshly.

'Why?'

'I look too young--an old dressed doll.'

'Will that, madam?'

'No, I look a fright--a perfect fright!'

'This way, perhaps?'

'Heavens! Don't worry me so.' She shut her lips like a trap.

Having once worked herself up to the belief that her head-dress was to be a failure that evening, no cleverness of Cytherea's in arranging it could please her. She continued in a smouldering passion during the remainder of the performance, keeping her lips firmly closed, and the muscles of her body rigid. Finally, snatching up her gloves, and taking her handkerchief and fan in her hand, she silently sailed out of the room, without betraying the least consciousness of another woman's presence behind her.

Cytherea's fears that at the undressing this suppressed anger would find a vent, kept her on thorns throughout the evening. She tried to read; she could not. She tried to sew; she could not. She tried to muse; she could not do that connectedly. 'If this is the beginning, what will the end be!' she said in a whisper, and felt many misgivings as to the policy of being overhasty in establishing an independence at the expense of congruity with a cherished past.

3. MIDNIGHT

The clock struck twelve. The Aldclyffe state dinner was over. The company had all gone, and Miss Aldclyffe's bell rang loudly and jerkingly.

Cytherea started to her feet at the sound, which broke in upon a fitful sleep that had overtaken her. She had been sitting drearily in her chair waiting minute after minute for the signal, her brain in that state of intentness which takes cognizance of the passage of Time as a real motion--motion without matter--the instants throbbing past in the company of a feverish pulse. She hastened to the room, to find the lady sitting before the dressing shrine, illuminated on both sides, and looking so queenly in her attitude of absolute repose, that the younger woman felt the awfulest sense of responsibility at her Vandalism in having undertaken to demolish so imposing a pile.

The lady's jewelled ornaments were taken off in silence--some by her own listless hands, some by Cytherea's. Then followed the outer stratum of clothing. The dress being removed, Cytherea took it in her hand and went with it into the bedroom adjoining, intending to hang it in the wardrobe. But on second thoughts, in order that she might not keep Miss Aldclyffe waiting a moment longer than necessary, she flung it down on the first resting-place that came to hand, which happened to be the bed, and re-entered the dressing-room with the noiseless footfall of a kitten. She paused in the middle of the room.

She was unnoticed, and her sudden return had plainly not been expected. During the short time of Cytherea's absence, Miss Aldclyffe had pulled off a kind of chemisette of Brussels net, drawn high above the throat, which she had worn with her evening dress as a semi-opaque covering to her shoulders, and in its place had put her night-gown round her. Her right hand was lifted to her neck, as if engaged in fastening her night-gown.

But on a second glance Miss Aldclyffe's proceeding was clearer to Cytherea. She was not fastening her night-gown; it had been carelessly thrown round her, and Miss Aldclyffe was really occupied in holding up to her eyes some small object that she was keenly scrutinizing. And now on suddenly discovering the presence of Cytherea at the back of the apartment, instead of naturally continuing or concluding her inspection, she desisted hurriedly; the tiny snap of a spring was heard, her hand was removed, and she began adjusting her robes.

Modesty might have directed her hasty action of enwrapping her shoulders, but it was scarcely likely, considering Miss Aldclyffe's temperament, that she had all her life been used to a maid, Cytherea's youth, and the elder lady's marked treatment of her as if she were a mere child or plaything. The matter was too slight to reason about, and yet upon the whole it seemed that Miss Aldclyffe must have a practical reason for concealing her neck.

With a timid sense of being an intruder Cytherea was about to step back and out of the room; but at the same moment Miss Aldclyffe turned, saw the impulse, and told her companion to stay, looking into her eyes as if she had half an intention to explain something. Cytherea felt certain it was the little mystery of her late movements. The other withdrew her eyes; Cytherea went to fetch the dressing-gown, and wheeled round again to bring it up to Miss Aldclyffe, who had now partly removed her night-dress to put it on the proper way, and still sat with her back towards Cytherea.

Her neck was again quite open and uncovered, and though hidden from the direct line of Cytherea's vision, she saw it reflected in the glass--the fair white surface, and the inimitable combination of curves between throat and bosom which artists adore, being brightly lit up by the light burning on either side.

And the lady's prior proceedings were now explained in the simplest manner. In the midst of her breast, like an island in a sea of pearl, reclined an exquisite little gold locket, embellished with arabesque work of blue, red, and white enamel. That was undoubtedly what Miss Aldclyffe had been contemplating; and, moreover, not having been put off with her other ornaments, it was to be retained during the night--a slight departure from the custom of ladies which Miss Aldclyffe had at first not cared to exhibit to her new assistant, though now, on further thought, she seemed to have become indifferent on the matter.

'My dressing-gown,' she said, quietly fastening her night-dress as she spoke.

Cytherea came forward with it. Miss Aldclyffe did not turn her head, but looked inquiringly at her maid in the glass.

'You saw what I wear on my neck, I suppose?' she said to Cytherea's reflected face.

'Yes, madam, I did,' said Cytherea to Miss Aldclyffe's reflected face.

Miss Aldclyffe again looked at Cytherea's reflection as if she were on the point of explaining. Again she checked her resolve, and said lightly--

'Few of my maids discover that I wear it always. I generally keep it a secret--not that it matters much. But I was careless with you, and seemed to want to tell you. You win me to make confidences that....'

She ceased, took Cytherea's hand in her own, lifted the locket with the other, touched the spring and disclosed a miniature.

'It is a handsome face, is it not?' she whispered mournfully, and even timidly.

'It is.'

But the sight had gone through Cytherea like an electric shock, and there was an instantaneous awakening of perception in her, so thrilling in its presence as to be well-nigh insupportable. The face in the miniature was the face of her own father--younger and fresher than she had ever known him--but her father!

Was this the woman of his wild and unquenchable early love? And was this the woman who had figured in the gate-man's story as answering the name of Cytherea before her judgment was awake? Surely it was. And if so, here was the tangible outcrop of a romantic and hidden stratum of the past hitherto seen only in her imagination; but as far as her scope allowed, clearly defined therein by reason of its strangeness.

Miss Aldclyffe's eyes and thoughts were so intent upon the miniature that she had not been conscious of Cytherea's start of surprise. She went on speaking in a low and abstracted tone.

'Yes, I lost him.' She interrupted her words by a short meditation, and went on again. 'I lost him by excess of honesty as regarded my past. But it was best that it should be so.... I was led to think rather more than usual of the circumstances to-night because of your name. It is pronounced the same way, though differently spelt.'

The only means by which Cytherea's surname could have been spelt to Miss Aldclyffe must have been by Mrs. Morris or Farmer Springrove. She

fancied Farmer Springrove would have spelt it properly if Edward was his informant, which made Miss Aldclyffe's remark obscure.

Women make confidences and then regret them. The impulsive rush of feeling which had led Miss Aldclyffe to indulge in this revelation, trifling as it was, died out immediately her words were beyond recall; and the turmoil, occasioned in her by dwelling upon that chapter of her life, found vent in another kind of emotion--the result of a trivial accident.

Cytherea, after letting down Miss Aldclyffe's hair, adopted some plan with it to which the lady had not been accustomed. A rapid revulsion to irritation ensued. The maiden's mere touch seemed to discharge the pent-up regret of the lady as if she had been a jar of electricity.

'How strangely you treat my hair!' she exclaimed.

A silence.

'I have told you what I never tell my maids as a rule; of course nothing that I say in this room is to be mentioned outside it.' She spoke crossly no less than emphatically.

'It shall not be, madam,' said Cytherea, agitated and vexed that the woman of her romantic wonderings should be so disagreeable to her.

'Why on earth did I tell you of my past?' she went on.

Cytherea made no answer.

The lady's vexation with herself, and the accident which had led to the disclosure swelled little by little till it knew no bounds. But what was done could not be undone, and though Cytherea had shown a most winning responsiveness, quarrel Miss Aldclyffe must. She recurred to the subject of Cytherea's want of expertness, like a bitter reviewer, who finding the sentiments of a poet unimpeachable, quarrels with his rhymes.

'Never, never before did I serve myself such a trick as this in engaging a maid!' She waited for an expostulation: none came. Miss Aldclyffe tried again.

'The idea of my taking a girl without asking her more than three questions, or having a single reference, all because of her good l--, the shape of her face and body! It was a fool's trick. There, I am served right, quite right--by being deceived in such a way.'

'I didn't deceive you,' said Cytherea. The speech was an unfortunate one, and was the very 'fuel to maintain its fires' that the other's petulance desired.

'You did,' she said hotly.

'I told you I couldn't promise to be acquainted with every detail of routine just at first.'

'Will you contradict me in this way! You are telling untruths, I say.'

Cytherea's lip quivered. 'I would answer the remark if--if--'

'If what?'

'If it were a lady's!'

'You girl of impudence--what do you say? Leave the room this instant, I tell you.'

'And I tell you that a person who speaks to a lady as you do to me, is no lady herself!'

'To a lady? A lady's-maid speaks in this way. The idea!'

'Don't "lady's-maid" me: nobody is my mistress I won't have it!'

'Good Heavens!'

'I wouldn't have come--no--I wouldn't! if I had known!'

'What?'

'That you were such an ill-tempered, unjust woman!'

'Possess beyond the Muse's painting,' Miss Aldclyffe exclaimed--

'A Woman, am I! I'll teach you if I am a Woman!' and lifted her hand as if she would have liked to strike her companion. This stung the maiden into absolute defiance.

'I dare you to touch me!' she cried. 'Strike me if you dare, madam! I am not afraid of you--what do you mean by such an action as that?'

Miss Aldclyffe was disconcerted at this unexpected show of spirit, and ashamed of her unladylike impulse now it was put into words. She sank back in the chair. 'I was not going to strike you--go to your room--I beg you to go to your room!' she repeated in a husky whisper.

Cytherea, red and panting, took up her candlestick and advanced to the table to get a light. As she stood close to them the rays from the candles struck sharply on her face. She usually bore a much stronger likeness to her mother than to her father, but now, looking with a grave, reckless, and angered expression of countenance at the kindling wick as she held it slanting into the other flame, her father's features were distinct in her. It was the first time Miss Aldclyffe had seen her in a passionate mood, and wearing that expression which was invariably its concomitant. It was Miss Aldclyffe's turn to start now; and the

remark she made was an instance of that sudden change of tone from high-flown invective to the pettiness of curiosity which so often makes women's quarrels ridiculous. Even Miss Aldclyffe's dignity had not sufficient power to postpone the absorbing desire she now felt to settle the strange suspicion that had entered her head.

'You spell your name the common way, G, R, E, Y, don't you?' she said, with assumed indifference.

'No,' said Cytherea, poised on the side of her foot, and still looking into the flame.

'Yes, surely? The name was spelt that way on your boxes: I looked and saw it myself.'

The enigma of Miss Aldclyffe's mistake was solved. 'O, was it?' said Cytherea. 'Ah, I remember Mrs. Jackson, the lodging-house keeper at Budmouth, labelled them. We spell our name G, R, A, Y, E.'

'What was your father's trade?'

Cytherea thought it would be useless to attempt to conceal facts any longer. 'His was not a trade,' she said. 'He was an architect.'

'The idea of your being an architect's daughter!'

'There's nothing to offend you in that, I hope?'

'O no.'

'Why did you say "the idea"?''

'Leave that alone. Did he ever visit in Gower Street, Bloomsbury, one Christmas, many years ago?--but you would not know that.'

'I have heard him say that Mr. Huntway, a curate somewhere in that part of London, and who died there, was an old college friend of his.'

'What is your Christian name?'

'Cytherea.'

'No! And is it really? And you knew that face I showed you? Yes, I see you did.' Miss Aldclyffe stopped, and closed her lips impassibly. She was a little agitated.

'Do you want me any longer?' said Cytherea, standing candle in hand and looking quietly in Miss Aldclyffe's face.

'Well--no: no longer,' said the other lingeringly.

'With your permission, I will leave the house to morrow morning, madam.'

'Ah.' Miss Aldclyffe had no notion of what she was saying.

'And I know you will be so good as not to intrude upon me during the short remainder of my stay?'

Saying this Cytherea left the room before her companion had answered. Miss Aldclyffe, then, had recognized her at last, and had been curious about her name from the beginning.

The other members of the household had retired to rest. As Cytherea went along the passage leading to her room her skirts rustled against the partition. A door on her left opened, and Mrs. Morris looked out.

'I waited out of bed till you came up,' she said, 'it being your first night, in case you should be at a loss for anything. How have you got on with Miss Aldclyffe?'

'Pretty well--though not so well as I could have wished.'

'Has she been scolding?'

'A little.'

'She's a very odd lady--'tis all one way or the other with her. She's not bad at heart, but unbearable in close quarters. Those of us who

don't have much to do with her personally, stay on for years and years.'

'Has Miss Aldclyffe's family always been rich?' said Cytherea.

'O no. The property, with the name, came from her mother's uncle. Her family is a branch of the old Aldclyffe family on the maternal side. Her mother married a Bradleigh--a mere nobody at that time--and was on that account cut by her relations. But very singularly the other branch of the family died out one by one--three of them, and Miss Aldclyffe's great-uncle then left all his property, including this estate, to Captain Bradleigh and his wife--Miss Aldclyffe's father and mother--on condition that they took the old family name as well. There's all about it in the "Landed Gentry." 'Tis a thing very often done.'

'O, I see. Thank you. Well, now I am going. Good-night.'

VI. THE EVENTS OF TWELVE HOURS

1. AUGUST THE NINTH. ONE TO TWO O'CLOCK A.M.

Cytherea entered her bedroom, and flung herself on the bed, bewildered by a whirl of thought. Only one subject was clear in her mind, and it was that, in spite of family discoveries, that day was to be the first